

What Is Claimed Is:

1 1. A method of permitting a user to order merchandise on a client
2 that communicates with a server, the server responding to on-demand requests for
3 a web page containing promotional items of merchandise, wherein the server
4 sends to the client the web page and an auxiliary file containing descriptive data
5 related to the promotional items, comprising:

6 receiving, at the client, the web page and the auxiliary file, to produce a
7 graphical depiction of one or more promotional items on a graphical user
8 interface coupled to the client and configured to receive input from the user;

9 displaying descriptive data related to at least one of the promotional items
10 in response to a request from the user, wherein the descriptive data is read from
11 the auxiliary file and displayed with the graphical depiction on the graphical user
12 interface; and

13 sending descriptive data related to one of the promotional items to a
14 selection panel in response to a selection request from the user, wherein the
15 selection panel is displayed with the graphical depiction on the graphical user
16 interface, wherein said sending is implemented by the client reading the auxiliary
17 file and without having to query the server for the descriptive data.

1 2. A method of claim 1, wherein said displaying descriptive data is
2 implemented in response to a pointer linked to an input device being moved over
3 one of the promotional items.

1 3. A method of claim 2, further comprising altering the hue,
2 saturation, brightness or lightness of the promotional item in response to the
3 pointer being moved over the promotional item, wherein said altering indicates
4 the availability of at least one of a subassembly image of the promotional item,
5 discounts, related items, alternative packaging, alternative sizes, alternative

6 colors, minimum order requirements, and comments from other customers or
7 consumer activist groups.

1 4. A method of claim 1, wherein said sending descriptive data is
2 implemented in response to an input device being operated to drag and drop the
3 promotional item into the selection panel.

1 5. A method of claim 1, wherein said sending descriptive data is
2 implemented in response to an input device being operated to click on the
3 promotional item.

1 6. A method of claim 1, further comprising providing a window
2 containing a subassembly of one of the promotional items in response to an input
3 device being operated to click on the promotional item, wherein the subassembly
4 comprises a plurality of additional promotional items having related descriptive
5 data and capable of being sent to the selection panel.

1 7. A method of claim 1, further comprising sending a purchase
2 request to the server to purchase the promotional item sent to the selection panel,
3 wherein said sending a purchase request is implemented in response to an order
4 request from the user.

1 8. A method of claim 7, wherein said sending a purchase request
2 further comprises synchronizing the selection panel with a duplicate of the
3 selection panel located on the server.

1 9. A method of claim 1, wherein said sending descriptive data further
2 comprises waiting to receive a confirmation signal, from the server, to verify the
3 promotional item has been added to a duplicate panel of the selection panel.

1 10. A method of claim 1, further comprising deleting a promotional
2 item from the selection panel in response to an input device being operated to
3 drag said promotional item out of the selection panel.

1 11. A method of claim 1, wherein said receiving to produce a graphic
2 depiction further comprises producing a parts explosion image of the promotional
3 item as the graphic depiction, wherein each part within the image represents a
4 component of the promotional item.

1 12. A method of claim 1, wherein said sending descriptive data further
2 comprises sending the descriptive data to a selection panel providing a
3 metaphorical representation of a shopping cart, shopping basket or trolley.

1 13. A method of permitting a user to view and interact with an
2 electronic shopping catalog on a client, comprising the steps of:

3 generating instructions to display an interactive image of a catalog
4 page from the electronic shopping catalog, wherein said generating includes
5 formatting the instructions to match the configuration requirements of the client;

6 appending to the instructions an auxiliary file containing
7 descriptive data related to promotional items of merchandise associated with the
8 catalog page; and

9 sending the instructions over the Internet to the client, to command
10 the client to

11 produce a graphical depiction of one or more promotional
12 items, on a graphical user interface coupled to the client and configured to receive
13 input from the user;

14 display descriptive data related to at least one of the
15 promotional items, with the graphical depiction on the graphical user interface,
16 in response to a request from the user; and

17 read the auxiliary file to send descriptive data related to
18 one of the promotional items to a selection panel in response to a selection
19 request from the user, without having to query the server for the descriptive data;
20 and

21 display the selection panel with the graphical depiction on
22 the graphical user interface.

1 14. A system for permitting a user to order merchandise on a client,
2 said client programmable to send requests to a server for a web page containing
3 promotional items of merchandise and an auxiliary file containing descriptive
4 data related to the promotional items, comprising:

5 an image generator to produce a graphical depiction of one or
6 more promotional items on a graphical user interface coupled to said client;

7 a descriptive data generator to display descriptive data related to
8 one of said promotional items in response to a pointer linked to an input device
9 being moved over said promotional item by the user, wherein said descriptive
10 data is read from the auxiliary file and displayed with said graphical depiction on
11 said graphical user interface; and

12 an order panel generator to produce a selection panel on said
13 graphical user interface, wherein said selection panel compiles a list of said
14 promotional items that are sent to said selection panel in response to a selection
15 request, wherein said list is produced by querying the auxiliary file for descriptive
16 data corresponding to said list without having to query the server for said
17 corresponding descriptive data.

1 15. A system of claim 14, wherein said image generator alters the hue
2 or lightness of one of said promotional items in response to said pointer being
3 moved over said promotional item, wherein the hue or lightness indicates the
4 availability of at least one of a subassembly image of said promotional item,
5 discounts, related items, alternative packaging, alternative sizes, alternative

6 colors, minimum order requirements, and comments from other customers or
7 consumer activist groups.

1 16. A system of claim 14, wherein said order panel generator displays
2 said selection panel with said graphical depiction on said graphical user interface.

1 17. A system of claim 14, further comprising:
2 an order executor to send a request to the server to purchase said
3 promotional items sent to said selection panel, wherein said purchase request is
4 sent in response to an order request from the user; and
5 an order initiator to produce a duplicate selection panel on the
6 server, wherein entries or deletions of said promotional items in said selection
7 panel sends a request for entries or deletions of said promotional items in said
8 duplicate selection panel, wherein said purchase request from said order executor
9 causes the server to synchronize said duplicate selection panel with said selection
10 panel.

1 18. A system for permitting a user to view and interact with an
2 electronic shopping catalog on a client, comprising:
3 an e-sessions controller to generate instructions to display an
4 interactive image of a catalog page from the electronic shopping catalog, wherein
5 said instructions include an auxiliary file containing descriptive data related to
6 promotional items of merchandise on said catalog page, wherein said instructions
7 are formatted to match the configuration requirements of the client; and
8 a route controller to send said instructions over the Internet to the
9 client to produce
10 an image generator to produce a graphical depiction of one
11 or more promotional items on a graphical user interface coupled to the client;
12 a descriptive data generator to generate descriptive data
13 related to one of said promotional items in response to a pointer linked to an input

14 device being moved over said promotional item by the user, wherein said
15 descriptive data is displayed with said graphical depiction on said graphical user
16 interface; and

17 an order panel generator to produce a selection panel on
18 said graphical user interface, wherein said selection panel compiles a list of said
19 promotional items that are sent to said selection panel in response to a selection
20 request, wherein said descriptive data generator reads said auxiliary file to
21 provide descriptive data corresponding to said list, without having to query the
22 server for said corresponding descriptive data.

1 19. A system of claim 18, further comprising a catalog selector to
2 receive a request for contents of said catalog page and send instructions to display
3 said contents on said graphical user interface.

1 20. A system of claim 18, further comprising an order processor to
2 receive requests from the client to purchase said promotional items sent to said
3 selection panel.

1 21. A system of claim 18, wherein said image generator alters the hue
2 or lightness of one of said promotional items in response to said pointer being
3 moved over said promotional item, wherein the hue or lightness indicates the
4 availability of at least one of a subassembly image of said promotional item,
5 discounts, related items, alternative packaging, alternative sizes, alternative
6 colors, minimum order requirements, and comments from other customers or
7 consumer activist groups.

1 22. A computer program product comprising a computer useable
2 medium having computer readable program code means embedded in said
3 medium for causing an application program to execute on a computer that
4 communicates with a server and permits a user to order merchandise on the

5 computer, wherein the computer is programmable to send requests to a server for
6 a web page containing promotional items of merchandise and an auxiliary file
7 containing descriptive data related to the promotional items, said computer
8 readable program code means comprising:

9 a first computer readable program code means for causing the
10 computer to produce a graphical depiction of one or more promotional items on
11 a graphical user interface coupled to the computer;

12 a second computer readable program code means for causing the
13 computer to display descriptive data related to one of said promotional items in
14 response to a pointer linked to an input device being moved over said
15 promotional item, wherein said descriptive data is read from the auxiliary file and
16 displayed with said graphical depiction on said graphical user interface; and

17 a third computer readable program code means for causing the
18 computer to display a selection panel on said graphical user interface with said
19 graphical depiction, wherein said selection panel compiles an editable list of said
20 promotional items that are sent to said selection panel in response to a selection
21 request, wherein said editable list is produced by querying the auxiliary file for
22 descriptive data corresponding to said editable list without having to query the
23 server for said corresponding descriptive data.

1 23. A computer program product according to claim 22, wherein said
2 first computer readable program code means further causes the computer to alter
3 the hue or lightness of one of said promotional items in response to said pointer
4 being moved over said promotional item, wherein the hue or lightness indicates
5 the availability of at least one of a subassembly image of said promotional item,
6 discounts, related items, alternative packaging, alternative sizes, alternative
7 colors, minimum order requirements, and comments from other customers or
8 consumer activist groups.

1 24. A computer program product according to claim 22, further
2 comprising a fourth computer readable program code means for causing the
3 computer to send a request to the server to purchase said promotional items sent
4 to said selection panel, wherein said purchase request is sent in response to an
5 order request from the user.

1 25. A computer program product according to claim 24, further
2 comprising a fifth computer readable program code means for causing the
3 computer to produce a duplicate selection panel on the server, wherein entries or
4 deletions of said promotional items in said selection panel sends a request for
5 entries or deletions of said promotional items in said duplicate selection panel,
6 wherein said purchase request from said fourth computer readable program code
7 causes the server to synchronize said duplicate selection panel with said selection
8 panel.

1 26. A method of permitting a user to order merchandise on a client
2 that communicates with a plurality of servers, said servers sending web pages
3 containing one or more promotional items of merchandise and said servers
4 sending an auxiliary file for each web page to provide descriptive data
5 corresponding to the promotional items, comprising:

6 receiving, from a first server, a first graphical depiction of a first
7 promotional item and a first auxiliary file corresponding to the first promotional
8 item in response to a request for the first promotional item;

9 displaying the first graphical depiction on a graphical user interface that
10 is coupled to the client and configured to receive input from the user, wherein
11 said displaying is implemented in response to the user requesting to view the first
12 promotional item;

13 receiving, from a second server, a second graphical depiction of a second
14 promotional item and a second auxiliary file corresponding to the second
15 promotional item in response to a request for the second promotional item;

16 displaying the second graphical depiction on the graphical user interface,
17 wherein said displaying of the second graphical depiction is implemented in
18 response to the user requesting to view the second promotional item; and

19 receiving, from the first server, a selection panel application instructing
20 the client to display, on the graphical user interface, a selection panel with one of
21 the first graphical depiction or the second graphical depiction, and instructing the
22 client to read and send descriptive data from the auxiliary file corresponding to
23 at least one of the promotional items from the first graphical depiction or the
24 second graphical depiction to the selection panel in response to a selection request
25 from the user.

1 27. A method of 26, wherein said receiving a selection panel further
2 comprises receiving instructions for the selection panel application to remain
3 actively operable on the client during said receiving a second graphical depiction,
4 whereby the client is instructed to display the selection panel with the second
5 graphical depiction and to read and send descriptive data from the second
6 auxiliary file.

7 28. A method of 26, further comprising:
8 storing the selection panel application to a memory disposed on one of the
9 client or the first server prior to said receiving a second graphical depiction,
10 wherein said receiving a selection panel application includes receiving the
11 selection panel application from the memory, whereby the client is instructed to
12 display the selection panel with the second graphical depiction and to read and
13 send descriptive data from the second auxiliary file.

1 29. A method of 26, further comprising:
2 wherein said receiving a second graphical depiction includes maintaining
3 an active connection between the client and the first server to continue an
4 interactive session with the first server while the client displays the selection

5 panel with the second graphical depiction and reads and sends descriptive data
6 from the second auxiliary file.

1 30. A system for permitting a user to order merchandise on a client
2 that communicates with two or more servers, said servers sending web pages
3 containing one or more promotional items of merchandise and said servers
4 sending an auxiliary file for each web page to provide descriptive data
5 corresponding to the promotional items located thereon, comprising:

6 a local sessions controller to receive, from a server, a graphical depiction
7 of a promotional item and an auxiliary file corresponding to said promotional
8 item, wherein said graphical depiction is received in response to a request for said
9 promotional item;

10 an image generator to display said graphical depiction on a graphical user
11 interface coupled to said client; and

12 an order panel generator to display a selection panel with said graphical
13 depiction on said graphical user interface, wherein said selection panel compiles
14 an editable list of said promotional items that are sent to said selection panel in
15 response to a selection request, wherein said editable list is produced by querying
16 said auxiliary file for descriptive data corresponding to said editable list.

1 31. A system of 30, wherein said order panel generator remains
2 actively operable on the client when the client receives and displays a second
3 graphical depiction of said promotional items from a second server, wherein said
4 order panel generator displays said selection panel with said second graphical
5 depiction on said graphical user interface, wherein descriptive data is read from
6 a second auxiliary file to compile an editable list of said promotional items that
7 are sent to said selection panel, wherein said auxiliary file corresponds to said
8 promotional items.

1 32. A system of 30, wherein said order panel generator is stored and
2 retrieved from a memory disposed on one of the client or said server when the
3 client receives and displays a second graphical depiction of said promotional
4 items from a second server, wherein said client is instructed to display said
5 selection panel with said second graphical depiction, wherein descriptive data is
6 read from said second auxiliary file to compile an editable list of said promotional
7 items that are sent to said selection panel, wherein said auxiliary file corresponds
8 to said promotional items.

1 33. A computer program product comprising a computer useable
2 medium having computer readable program code means embedded in said
3 medium for causing an application program to execute on a computer that permits
4 a user to order merchandise on the computer that communicates with two or more
5 servers, said servers sending web pages containing one or more promotional items
6 of merchandise and said servers sending an auxiliary file for each web page to
7 provide descriptive data corresponding to the promotional items located thereon,
8 said computer readable program code means comprising:

9 a first computer readable program code means for causing the computer
10 to receive, from a server, a graphical depiction of a promotional item and an
11 auxiliary file corresponding to said promotional item, wherein said graphical
12 depiction is received in response to a request for said promotional item;

13 a second computer readable program code means for causing the computer
14 to display said graphical depiction on a graphical user interface coupled to said
15 client; and

16 a third computer readable program code means for causing the computer
17 to display a selection panel with said graphical depiction on said graphical user
18 interface, wherein said selection panel compiles an editable list of said
19 promotional items that are sent to said selection panel in response to a selection
20 request, wherein said editable list is produced by querying said auxiliary file for
21 descriptive data corresponding to said editable list.

22 34. A computer program product according to claim 33, wherein said
23 third computer readable program code means remains actively operable on the
24 computer when the computer receives and displays a second graphical depiction
25 of said promotional items from a second server, wherein said third computer
26 readable program code means displays said selection panel with said second
27 graphical depiction on said graphical user interface, wherein descriptive data is
28 read from a second auxiliary file to compile an editable list of said promotional
29 items that are sent to said selection panel, wherein said auxiliary file corresponds
30 to said promotional items.

1 35. A computer program product according to claim 33, wherein said
2 third computer readable program code means is stored and retrieved from a
3 memory disposed on one of the computer or said server when the computer
4 receives and displays a second graphical depiction of said promotional items from
5 a second server, wherein said computer is instructed to display said selection
6 panel with said second graphical depiction, wherein descriptive data is read from
7 said second auxiliary file to compile an editable list of said promotional items that
8 are sent to said selection panel, wherein said auxiliary file corresponds to said
9 promotional items.